

- Is the problem with a quote?
- If the problem is a quote, is it an actual quote inside quotation marks or is it a paraphrase?
- Is the problem the general tone of the story?
- Is the problem that something vital was left out of the article or missed?

In general, a printed or on-air correction/clarification will not run as prominently as the original story.

Headline Errors

Complain only about a totally inaccurate headline, not a sloppy headline. Remember, reporters don't write headlines. In general, they're just as resentful as you are when a bad headline gets into the paper. However, start with the reporter and ask him what can be done and if a correction is possible.



Factual Errors

Misidentified individuals in pictures and misspelled names are some of the most common factual errors. In the case of misidentified people or misspelled names, a printed correction is usually in order and should be gladly given. Other factual errors are harder to deal with.

If the story is inaccurate--if it says you did something that you didn't do or makes that kind of error--then you want to talk to the reporter. It is up to you to decide whether you want to pursue a written correction. Sometimes you are better off convincing the reporter to do a follow-up story that corrects the original problem. A new story will be more widely read than a small, written correction.

Quotation Errors

Many reporters carry tape recorders to ensure that they get the quote right. However, mistakes can happen.

The majority of people who complain about a quote are usually complaining about an inaccurate paraphrase---something that distills what you said but not in your own words. Think out paraphrases carefully. Most of the time they actually do get the gist of what you said -- it just isn't the way you would have said it. In general, you have no redress in these situations.

If a quote is actually wrong—your supposed statement is represented inside quotation marks saying something you did not say--then you can pursue a correction of some type. First, though, ask yourself how bad is the problem? If it is a case of just a few words that don't make any difference, you're probably better off leaving it alone. You might want to watch yourself with that reporter in the future, or you might tape record your future conversations. At the very least, take good notes. A really good reporter shouldn't even get one word in a quote wrong.

In order to make your case, you need to have some documentation of what you said. If you are dealing with a controversial issue, this is particularly important. It is okay to have witnesses to your interview or even to tape your interviews as long as the reporter knows it is being taped.

Tone Problems

These are really touchy. Some reporters present a story factually and allow the reader to make up his or her own mind. Some reporters practice what's called advocacy journalism--which means they are taking a side or advocating a particular position.

It is hard to fight advocacy journalism. You can write a letter to the editor of the publication, setting the record straight. You can write an op-ed – an editorial that the paper may or may not publish and will likely edit or shorten to meet page layout requirements. You can ask your program friends and advocates to write letters and op-eds. As always, treat the advocacy journalist fairly and decently. Respond to the reporter's questions quickly and accurately. Work to build a relationship with the